



CONNECTICUT
SCHOOL
COUNSELOR
ASSOCIATION

The Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) is the organization in the state that promotes leadership and creates a professional school counseling identity. This is achieved by connecting, supporting, and empowering school counselors through professional learning and advocacy.

Testimony of Virginia A. DeLong, Government Relations & Advocacy Chair
Connecticut School Counselor Association

in regards to

**H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING
JUNE 30, 2023.**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing - February 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Virginia DeLong and I am the Government Relations & Advocacy Chair for the CT School Counselor Association and the Director of School Counseling & Admissions at Norwich Technical High School. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB5037- An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. **Specifically, I am here today to testify about the importance of school counselors and the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student has access to a school counselor.**

Our association represents over 1,400 school counselors across the state that are doing important work with our students in our schools. For the last 6 years I have been advocating for the addition of more school counselors and educating legislators on the role of the school counselor, helping them to understand the difference between school counselors and our counterparts, school social workers and school psychologists. Our association has been sounding the alarm for at least the last 6 years on the mental health crisis with our children and the need for more in-school supports for them. The pandemic has only exacerbated this need.

As an association we have been talking with our counselors from across the state and it is incredibly clear from their reports of the day to day needs of students that there is an even greater, increased need for more school counselors in our schools. A report just came out yesterday that CT's average student to school counselor ratio is 1:349. Can you imagine one person having to be responsible for the academic, career planning and social emotional health of 349 students? This is happening in schools across our state.

We can no longer sit idly by and hope that our kids are getting what they need. We need to be more aggressive in our approach to providing staffing at our schools to help address the mental health barriers to student success. School counselors are the frontline in our schools. They are often the first person to meet a new student who is registering, they are the first connection many students make with an adult, they are the "go to" person for many questions and concerns within the school building, and they are the glue that is holding many of our kids together during this pandemic.

It is evident by reading other education association proposals for schools, that they are missing the mark. It is not enough to implement social emotional "programs" in schools or increase the mental health literacy among staff. Schools can also not responsibly implement universal mental health screeners without having the staff to take care of the needs that come out of those screeners. Students need specifically trained mental health staff like school counselors, in our schools to identify students who need mental health support in school in order to decrease barriers to learning, and to be able to identify those in need of additional out-of-school supports. It is not fair, nor appropriate to be asking teachers to do

this when they do not have the proper training nor expertise. We have professionals who already exist to do this work; we need to make sure there are enough of them to do this work.

I strongly recommend that when the appropriations committee is looking at funding this session that they are not looking at education funding in a general sense but are also looking at key areas of where more of the funding needs to be allocated. I no longer think it's enough to give school districts general pots of money and ask them to allocate it as they see fit. Too many districts are missing the mark and not hiring school support staff, like school counselors, despite the growing mental health needs of our students. The State of Connecticut needs to be more bold in their approach. I believe it would be much more helpful for the legislature to designate a specific pot of money to be used to hire school counselors and other support staff so that money can not be allocated elsewhere by districts. If we cannot recognize that now is the time that we need to do this, then our children are going to continue to not receive the support that they need.

We need to do this for our children. Children who are the future leaders of our state. I am happy to discuss the role and impact of school counselors, or any other funding proposals with the legislature, at any time.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Virginia A. DeLong". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Virginia A. DeLong
Government Relations & Advocacy Chair
CT School Counselor Association
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